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ECONOMIC GROWTH

(Energy and Environment)

ADCL to spearhead creation of mangrove protection council

(Source: SunStar Pampanga News Online – 4/18/08_

CITY OF SAN FERNANDO -- The Advocacy for the Development of Central Luzon (ADCL) recently revealed its plan to meet with the Provincial Government officials and other sectoral representatives to push for the creation of a council that will monitor and oversee the protection and propagation of mangrove forests in Pampanga.

Renato Tayag Jr., ADCL president, said a multi-sectoral body is needed to advocate and draw up policies for protection, management and propagation of mangroves in the coastal areas of the province. He said the proposed name for the council is Pampanga Coastal Area Mangrove Development Council (PCA-MDC).

"We need to create a council that will focus on our mangrove forests that have gradually disappeared in the past years. All of us should take a serious look on this matter because mangroves serve as natural habitat to our marine life and provide economic benefits for farmers and fisherfolk. The council is also needed to seek for the declaration of mangrove areas as protected areas and shall be banned from fishpond conversion or reclamation," Tayag explained.

He said the primary members shall come from the Provincial Government, Provincial Board (PB), Pampanga Mayors League (PML), particularly the chief executives of all coastal municipalities, private organizations (POs) and non-government organizations (NGOs) advocating environmental protection and other agencies involved in the propagation and management of mangroves.

In the management handbook written by the Department of Environment and

Natural Resources (DENR) and the United States Agency for International Development (Usaid), a hectare of healthy mangrove forest alone supports fisheries worth at least P20,000 per year. But if other values are added for wood, lumber, erosion control and waste absorption, a one-hectare mangrove has an economic value of about P40,000 per year.

The DENR has reported that the mangrove forest resources of the Philippines have significantly deteriorated in the last 50 years. It added that the country has now less than 120,000 hectares of mangroves remaining and much of that is only secondary growth.

The environment department blames expansion of aquaculture ponds and conversion on urban land reclamation for the rapid mangrove loss. It fears that if this trend continues, there will be no more mangrove left in our country in the next 50 years.

Tayag said the ADCL takes the government's challenge to help save, protect and propagate our mangroves, particularly the common species of Bakauan.

"As part of our advocacy for environmental protection and agriculture, we believe that it is crucial to help propagate mangrove forests to enhance our marine life and provide economic benefits for the local communities," he said. (ABL)